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THE BALLAD OF THE CRUEL BROTHER.¹

BY PHILLIPS BARRY.

THE record of British ballads current in America continues to increase, while yet many a treasure awaits those who love and would preserve the folk-songs of our common race. To the number already at hand may now be added, "The Cruel Brother," represented by the following sterling version:—



1. Three Ladies played at cup and ball,—
(With a hey! and my lily gay!)
Three Knights there came among them all.
(The rose it smells so sweetly!)
2. And one of them was dressed in green,—
He asked me to be his queen.
3. And one of them was dressed in yellow,—
He asked me to be his fellow.
4. And one of them was dressed in red,—
He asked me with him to wed.
5. "But you must ask my father the King,
And you must ask my mother the Queen,—
6. "And you must ask my sister Anne,
And you must ask my brother John."
7. "Oh, I have asked your father the King,
And I have asked your mother the Queen,—
8. "And I have asked your sister Anne,
And I have asked your brother John."
9. Her father led her down the stairs,
Her mother led her down the hall.
10. Her sister Anne led her down the walk,
Her brother John put her on her horse.

¹ "The Cruel Brother," A (Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States); contributed by D. F. and R. F., as sung by E. S. P., Boston, Mass., in whose family it has been traditional for three generations.

11. And as she stooped to give him a kiss,
He stuck a penknife into her breast.
12. " Ride up, ride up, my foremost man!
Methinks my lady looks pale and wan!"
13. " Oh what will you leave to your father the King? "
" The golden coach that I ride in."
14. " And what will you leave to your mother the Queen?"
" The golden chair that I sat in."
15. " And what will you leave to your sister Anne?"
" My silver brooch and golden fan."
16. " And what will you leave to your brother John?"
" A pair of gallows to hang him on."
17. " And what will you leave to your brother John's wife?"
" Grief and misfortune all her life."

The texts hitherto known—excluding, of course, those obviously defective—agree, in that the bride is killed by her brother because his consent to the wedding has not been sought. In the present version the situation is unique, the brother acting as the agent of his wife's ill will. A motive for the curse in the final stanza is thus clear.

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